An instructor with HT-28 takes pilots through instrument training in the TH-57C at NAS Whiting Field, Fla., on 28 January.

HT-28 Looks Back on its First Year

Story and Photos by Lt. Benjamin Armstrong

Demands on the rotary wing community have increased with today's asymmetrical warfare as seen in the Global War on Terrorism. Nearly two-thirds of all Naval Aviators winged are helicopter pilots, and the rotary-wing ranks continue to grow with the addition of the tiltrotor community. To meet this growing need to train Navy and Marine helicopter pilots, Helicopter Training Squadron (HT) 28 stood up on 25 May 2007 at NAS Whiting Field, Fla. Formed with a cadre of instructor pilots selected from the HT-8 Eightballers and the HT-18 Vigilant Eagles, the HT-28 Hellions joined its sister squadrons at Whiting's South Field. The squadron trains new MV-22 Osprey pilots and provides the initial night vision goggle (NVG) instruction for all Navy, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, and allied helicopter pilots.

Named for the Hellions of Marine Fighter Squadron 218, a decorated Marine Corps F-4U Corsair squadron from WWII that included such aviation giants as John Glenn, the new squadron comes from a long tradition of warriors. In 1972 HT-18 split from HT-8, which had

A pair of TH-57s from HT-28 air taxi above the tarmac at NAS Whiting Field, Fla. Facing page, CO Cdr. John McLain conducts a preflight inspection prior to his first flight with HT-28. Photo by Lt. Michelle Parkington.

replaced Helicopter Training Unit 1, the Navy's first rotary-wing training unit, in 1960. From training the first helicopter assault pilots of the Vietnam War, to the long antisubmarine patrols of the Cold War, and supporting NASA through the training of 14 of the 15 original astronauts and the lunar landing mission, these helicopter training squadrons have played a vital role in U.S. national security.

Within weeks of HT-28's establishment, and less than nine months from the orders by the Chief of Naval Operations for the squadron to stand up, students began to train with the new unit. The flight schedule ramped up quickly as students and instructors arrived. In the first six months of operation the squadron flew nearly 8,000 flight hours—twice the number of hours a typical fleet helicopter squadron flies in an entire year. At the end of 2007 the squadron hit full production, flying approximately 150 hours a day.

The students of HT-28, with the radio call sign "Lucky," fly from NAS Whiting Field and its numerous outlying practice fields, including Spencer Field where helicopter pilots from the sea services have been learning to hover since the 1950s. The instructor pilots and students fly the TH-57B Sea Ranger in the familiarization phase of training and the TH-57C for instruments, navigation, and formation training. April 2008 marked the scheduled delivery of the squadron's first TH-57D, the prototype of the Navy's new advanced training helicopter.

The "Delta" features a new digital cockpit based around two multifunction displays, stroking seats to increase survivability, and a collective stick shaker that warns of high power settings. The new aircraft are a redesign of the ubiquitous Bell 206. The move to a single type/model/series anticipates not only cost savings to the Navy but a more efficient flight training system and better training for students who are about to enter the high technology world of rotary wing aviation.

HT-28 also administers training for rotary-wing aviators in the initial use of night vision goggles. This program includes 10 hours of ground training and simulators. The Training Wing 5 Night Vision Goggle Training Center runs a program approved by the Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron using the latest technology, including a digital classroom and computerized virtual terrain board for displays of NVG capabilities. At HT-28 and the other squadrons the flight

syllabus includes five flights with NVG instructor pilots focusing on basic flight maneuvers and navigation. This training helps fleet replenishment squadrons get their students to the fight faster and more efficiently.

The changing landscape of the modern battlefield forces the rapid expansion of rotary-wing aviation at a time when other communities are trimming their squadrons. From Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom to disaster rescue and relief efforts around the world, helicopters have become a vital element of modern air power. The Hellions of HT-28 have had their first of what are sure to be many years of success. The Hellions and its sister squadrons will continue to train the Naval Aviators who will take over the future fight.

Lt. Armstrong was an instructor pilot with HT-28 and is now the Safety Officer on *Wasp* (LHD 1).